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CHILDREN'S BOOK TRUST • NEW DELHI

WRITING FOR CHILDREN

MANORAMA JAFA

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Foreword

Children's literature in India and other developing countries is still in its infancy. We have few children's books that are the original self-expression of imaginative writers.

It seems to me that we adults and particularly parents don't sufficiently recognise the invaluable contribution good books can make in the development of a child. Throughout a child's reading life, one of the most useful functions any adult can perform is to tempt and lure the child to better, higher things than he would choose if left entirely to himself. School textbooks impart information and knowledge which is only one part of education. The other part, and the more important one in my view, is gained by releasing the hidden creative potential of young minds. Books fire a child's imagination and take him into a wonderful new world of fact or fiction.

The real secret of a child's book lies not merely in its being less dry and less difficult, but more rich in interest, either true to nature or fantasy, more exquisite in art, more abundant in every quality that responds to children's keener and fresher perceptions.

Encouragement to new writers to produce quality literature is the need of the day. A good rapport between the publisher, the writer and the illustrator is essential and that alone can bring out better books. The writer, who is the central actor in the entire field of book development, has to be given due recognition.

The writer has a great task ahead. He must remember that he is not writing for a non-caring, disinterested or apathetic audience but for the largest literate and openhearted audience in the world. Present-day children expect more than the old sentimental sweetness, the old superheroes, the old exploits of middle or upper class children solving crimes and accomplishing deeds beyond the courage or capacity of grown ups. They like to read real life stories about people and situations which are relevant to them.

As a beginning writer, I recall, how I struggled to find out how to write and what to write. The process of trial and error, reading published literature and participating in Writers' Workshops and conferences in different countries has led me to believe that the most urgent task is to develop new writers, train and guide them and provide a forum for interaction amongst them. In 1977, the Children's Book Trust afforded me an opportunity to experiment with these ideas. I developed some material for use at these workshops which has been put together in the shape of the present book.

I shall be greatly rewarded if, like the Writers' Workshops that I have conducted, this book enables some new talents to blossom into successful writers.

Manorama Jafa

October 1981

Problems a Beginning Writer Faces

Writing for children is a fascinating occupation. Like other fields of writing it has its own peculiarities and challenges. It is often assumed that writing for children is easy. Yes, up to a point. Rewriting folk-tales and classical tales can be easy but writing original fiction for children can be as difficult as any other creative writing. Besides, a writer of children's books has to observe certain restrictions, imposed partly by his young readers' limited ability to read and understand and partly by the fact that certain kinds of material cannot be offered to children. It is a specialised field and often needs greater attention and more effort than writing for adults. At the same time, as a children's writer your readership can be very large, choice of subjects wide and the field for experimentation immense.

A story needs an idea — Every story must have an idea, a nucleus around which it can be built. A beginning writer must start by reading some books for children and observing how simple ideas can be turned into interesting fiction. There are no ready made ideas, though you can learn a lot from the experience of other writers. You soon find that ideas can be obtained through observation. Watch children at play, at school, in their leisure and at home, and you will start getting ideas for your stories. Take note of small events and incidents around you and you may find something interesting. Train yourself to take mental photographs of all that you see and then pick up the ideas that interest you most.

Collect and preserve your ideas — Ideas will occur to you any time — when you talk to children, or travel with them, or when you read books, magazines or newspapers. Once you get an idea, you must preserve it. Do not rely too much on memory, instead, note the idea in a pocketbook. You may find it useful to carry a pocketbook with you all the time.

Re-enter your own childhood—To be able to reach a child reader, you must re-enter your own childhood, so to say. Once you have awakened your own childhood memories, you have already taken the first steps. A little practice will enable you to think like a child and look at the world through a child's eye. Here is how an idea led to a story. A little girl once had a very heavy bag of school books hanging from her left shoulder. It was so heavy that her left arm seemed longer than her right arm. The girl was perplexed to see one of her arms longer than the other. She spoke to her brother about it. He offered to carry her bag. And then she found that both her arms were the same length. After many years this childhood experience triggered her imagination and she developed it into amusing verse. She had been able to feel like a child once again, think like a child and then, with her adult skill, turned that experience into a charming poem.

Your characters must behave naturally — The child characters of your story should think and behave like children; adult characters should speak and behave like adults. Never make a child character behave or speak like an adult. To bring the characters in your story alive, you must look around for possible models. Get friendly with children, observe their behaviour, talk to them and notice their physique and appearance. Also see how they react to different situations. Often, children remind you of your own childhood and contact with them will enable you to draw upon your own early memories.

Children's stories need not leave out adult characters altogether. The first important point to remember is that

the adult characters in your story should be described as a child would see them. In modern children's fiction the viewpoint of a child is an important element and the stories are usually about other children and adult characters as seen through a child's eye. Most old folktales and classical stories, however, were adult oriented stories and the child's viewpoint was totally overlooked in them. Many of these need to be re-interpreted from the child's viewpoint. A second thing to remember is that once you have decided from which character's viewpoint you are presenting the story, that person's viewpoint should remain consistent all through. Otherwise, the story will become complicated and may confuse a young reader.

Naming your characters — Your characters come alive as soon as you name them. First and foremost the name of a character should match the setting. If your story is located in South India, your characters should have names common in that region. On the other hand, if you are describing a character in some North Indian village, the character must carry a name suitable for that geographical area. While naming characters the time element should also be kept in mind. Thus, a story set in the 12th century cannot have characters with modern names. So too a grandfather should not be given a name commonly given to children of today.

Your characters should have names in keeping with their religious background. You have to keep the age group in mind as well. If the main character is young and the story is meant for the same age group, you might even use a pet name for your character. Avoid two or more names beginning with the same letter because they can be confusing.

If you are writing for the very young, funny sounding names often produce a magical effect. Characters like Humpty Dumpty and Chota Mota have a charm of their own for young children.

Must have a message — We adults often have a tendency to talk down to children and to emphasise the moral of a story. But children hate sermons and also dislike the 'do and don't' style. You cannot, therefore, make the moral of the story too obvious; instead mingle it in such a way that the reader does not even suspect that the moral is intended for his attention.

Must be entertaining — Your message should not affect the entertainment value of the story. Unless your story is entertaining, it will not be read. Your main purpose is not to please yourself but to entertain your young reader. In this effort, some simple devices can be useful, like introducing dialogue and interesting situations and, of course, humour.

Use spoken language — Often, beginning writers mistakenly believe that a special kind of language should be employed while writing for children. In fact, children are used to spoken language and understand it without any strain. To the beginning writer also, spoken language comes naturally, it being easy to put thoughts on paper in a language that you use everyday. However, you should remember that most children have a limited vocabulary and moreover are not used to consulting a dictionary. For this reason the choice of words should, by and large, remain within the comprehension of the age group for which the story is written. You should also avoid slang language and dialect words since you would like your books to be read far and wide.

Age group — Your story idea usually determines the age group you are writing for. Given one set of characters, setting and language you cannot write both a picture book story for infants and also a story for high school children. Younger children have short attention spans and like short, simple tales. Older children like a few complications and more details thrown into a story. However, all children like to read about youngsters playing the leading roles.

The author's own views — The author's views can be jarring in a story. The reader wishes to be alone with the book to enjoy it thoroughly. You should not intrude upon him with your views or generalisations.

Immediacy is necessary in a children's story — An illusion of reality is important. The child reader must feel the events are taking place here and now. Reading is an emotional experience and the reader wants to identify with the characters of the story. Immediacy helps in this process of identification. Children are impatient and for this reason a story for them must start with the first word.

Above all, one has to recognise that children are their own masters and they will only read a story that interests them. A writer is in no position to force them to like his writing. You can be a successful writer only if you can reach children's hearts. Whatever you write, you might like to ask yourself three questions:

— Can a child follow the story?
— Will it entertain a child?
— Does it bring home the message subtly?

Know Your Audience

Each child has his own special likes and dislikes. But, because some books are read over and over again and some authors are more successful than others, it is recognised that there are some elements in children's literature that have an universal appeal.

Children like to be entertained first — First and foremost, children read a book for pleasure. Only if a child likes a book and enjoys reading it, will he read it from beginning to end.

Children like their stories to grow straight — Flashbacks in stories do not appeal to them. If you write for children upto the age of 12, you will be well advised to avoid flashbacks altogether. The straight growth of a story does not force a child to apply his mind to a flashback, which is a left over, forgotten time for a child.

Children are not nostalgic — The present enchants them and has meaning for them. They live in the world of the present. They do not think of the past nor are they worried about the future. The past and the future only matters to children once they have crossed into teenage. Because they live in the present, stories written for them should have the urgent quality of something happening now.

Children are impatient — They like their stories to begin immediately. They also like the story to grow fast. A slow pace and unnecessary detail bores them. For the same reason, children do not like too much information to be stuffed into a story.

Children love action — A children's story must be dramatic and quick paced. Many children prefer comics to a proper book because the action is quick and the pictures tell the story faster than words. Each picture takes the reader into a new situation, without his having to apply himself to reading a long text.

Children love dialogue — Dialogue is often more interesting than monotonous prose, which can readily tire out a young reader. It is important that dialogues sound natural and appropriate to the characters who are speaking them.

Children love suspense and novelty — Hackneyed plots tire children nor do they appreciate a very predictable story. At the same time, an element of anticipation (with some hope or fear lurking in the background) is more attractive to them than an unexpected surprise.

Children like to see a child play the lead role — It is easy for them to identify with child characters. They don't mind having adult characters in their stories but they certainly prefer a child of their age or a little older playing the main role. They appreciate stories in which childhood has a certain dignity. They don't like child characters to be shown acting in a childish way, because they find this belittling.

Children like to see themselves growing — An eight-year-old does not like reading picture books nor do teenagers like to be seen with a book meant for a younger age group. As they grow physically, children like to see themselves growing mentally as well.

Children like to receive a message — But they dislike sermons. You must have something worthwhile to say and weave in the message subtly. Children like a positive attitude in their stories and they naturally identify with the angels, not the devils.

Children prefer to read down to earth stories — Modern kids like realistic contemporary fiction. Today's youngsters are more alert, better informed and more independent than children in the past. They are also more aware of adult life. Truly realistic fiction, whether in the form of a short story or a full length book, gives them an opportunity to identify with varied characters, face difficult situations and learn to solve a variety of problems.

Children appreciate good presentation and a satisfying end — The didactic style of writing is not welcomed by children any more nor does it find favour with modern day critics. In the past, children's stories often ended thus: "So you see, children, you should never behave like the cruel giant but act like the sweet angel whom everyone loved." Today's children need to be taught morality more subtly. As for conclusions, it is the writer's work to finish a story, not the reader's. Predictable endings are often preferable to shocking or anti-climactic endings. For example, do not end a story with the revelation that the events narrated have all been a dream. This would be a let down for the reader.

Always write with a purpose — It is important for you to know what children like or do not like. It is equally important to know what you should give them. Children are innocent, impressionable and only too willing to unquestioningly accept the printed word. Your work should, therefore, impress the best ideas on their tender minds.

In the history of mankind noble ideas have gained ground gradually. Distinctions between good and bad have undergone changes as our values have developed over the years. However, certain universal values such as love, honesty and truth have always been regarded as superior to individual gains.

It is your responsibility to make children understand the absolute and profound relationship between happiness and love. Through your stories they must come to feel that they will be happier human beings when they love than when they hate, when they help than when they hurt. For this reason avoid the anti-hero qualities in the main character of your stories. Instead you should help children to develop self-confidence and faith in themselves and love for others by portraying child characters who have these qualities. Merely recounting an event does not make a story, this is just a simple reporting. Instead, you must have something worthwhile to say.

Give children the best — All successful authors write for the pleasure of their audience but as a children's writer you are expected also to satisfy the adults who influence the selection of books for children. Children are little adults in the making and you are expected to guide them to become good citizens of tomorrow. So work hard to produce an honest simple book which can become the best friend a child could have and adults could recommend.

Age Groups

Children's books cater to the needs of different age groups, from tiny tots to teenagers. With the same characters, plot and language you cannot write both a story for a pre-school child and a story for a teenager. As children grow, their perceptions, comprehension and vocabulary also undergo a rapid change and hence the need for different age group requirements. You can go to a library and look for books on reading guidance. These books classify children's books by age groups.

It is generally accepted that child readers fall into four major age groups (under fives, five to eight years old, eight to twelve years old, and twelve to sixteen years old) but these age categories are often very flexible depending on the mental age of the child. The guide-lines cannot be rigid as often older children enjoy nursery rhymes and animal stories while young children show interest in stories for older children.

Children under five — This is the look, learn and enjoy age. Children of this age like a simple one situation plot story without any complications. They are interested in stories which are knitted around familiar characters from their own environment. These include persons and objects like mother, father, toys, pets and birds. You must base your story on an idea which will remain within the comprehension of children. Young children also love simple fantasy stories, for instance, about an animal which talks or about a toy which gets up and runs away.

Children of this age are quite sensitive to unhappy stories or to anyone getting hurt. You have to keep in mind that the child will probably believe most of what happens in the story; so do not create situations which could disturb him or make him unhappy.

Books for this age group are meant to be read aloud. The sound of words is therefore as 'important' as the meaning. Tell the story plainly in simple short sentences or in verse. Children love the repetition of pleasant sounds and the rhymes of a simple verse which they can learn by heart.

Children between 5—8

Children of this age group are inquisitive and are interested in the world around them. They also have a vivid imagination. They fall into two, often overlapping, categories-(a) the beginner reader (b) the child listener.

Beginner reader — A beginner reader has three limitations. The first is his limited vocabulary. The second is his limited retention power. The third is his limited understanding of events and situations. Keeping these in mind, you must give the child a simple story which he can read independently, understand and retain easily. The material should be based on the child's small world. Writing for the beginner reader needs special effort and understanding.

REQUIREMENTS

- limited vocabulary
- familiar surroundings with familiar characters
- entertainment value
- emotional appeal
- child oriented but not babyish stories
- simple plot
- rhymes and simple tongue-twisters are welcome
- nothing scary
- happy ending

Child listener

Since the child listener does not have to read by himself, he hears, imagines and enjoys. The requirements for him are less exacting and you can take some liberty with your vocabulary, plot and characters. The child's world has grown wider and he can enjoy a simple fantasy, an adventure story, a folk tale or an uncomplicated mythological story.

The child listener is very inquisitive and his interjections of 'what' and 'why' are answered by the adult who is reading aloud to him.

He is impatient and his constant query is "What's next?" If you decide to write for the young listener, know that he is impatient, likes an illusion of reality, lives in the present and is not worried about the past or the future and loves a happy ending.

Children between 8—12

This age is really fun to write for and most beginning writers prefer to write for this audience. The child is old enough to read on his own and understands the world of adults. Anything which is entertaining and appealing is loved by children of this age. Most of the published children's literature, both fiction and non-fiction, is written for this age group.

REQUIREMENTS

* stories should be entertaining
* there should be lots of action
* stories should be centred around a child's own interests, problems and experience
* child oriented stories have a special appeal
* is interested in both fiction and in non-fiction, likes adventure, science, sport, anything presented entertainingly
* boys and girls of this age are aware of their sex. They don't like reading stories revolving around the other sex. So it is wise to have both girl and boy characters in your stories.

Children between 12—16

A child entering his teens is on the threshold of adult life. He is anxious to share adult responsibilities and his dearest wish is to be given the same respect as adults. He rebels against restrictions imposed on him, is temperamental and highly critical of the adult world. His likes and dislikes, attitudes and values are changing fast. He is therefore unsure of himself and as a result is extremely sensitive to criticism. Physically mature but emotionally juvenile, he lacks worldly experience but his judgment is often instinctively sound. In short, the teenager presents quite a challenge to the writer.

REQUIREMENTS

* The teenager faces problems, both physical and emotional, and unconsciously looks for solutions in the books he reads.
* He is interested in realistic fiction rather than fantasy. He likes to read down to earth stories about life-like characters whom he can identify with.
* Plots with romance are hot favourites with teenagers because interest in the opposite sex is growing at this stage.
* Their interest covers almost anything and everything. Worldly plots, adventure, romance and family stories are much in demand.

Essentially, books for this age group bridge the gap between adolescence and adulthood and the requirements are almost the same as those of good adult writing.

Important Feature of a Story

A theme or broad idea is the seed from which your story plant grows. A good idea is easier to define than to achieve. An idea should be new or your approach to it should be unusual. It must have appeal for a high percentage of your readers. Your idea must also be strong enough to bear the weight of a story. If your idea is weak, you cannot build an effective story.

Before you begin writing, you must decide what your theme is and what precisely you want to convey to the young reader. Put your idea into a single sentence. If you neglect to do this and begin writing without having decided on a theme, you may find that you have perhaps ended up by writing many different things and doling out random information without any cohesive central idea to bind it all up with. Such stories can be very confusing.

In full length fiction you can have one main theme with several other supporting themes. In a short story, however, it is better to restrict yourself to one single theme around which you build the plot. Having chanced upon a theme, the writer develops an idea based upon it. A theme can be used again and again in different ways by many writers, though an idea is a writer's very own property.

Here are a few themes

Honesty is the best policy
Love thy neighbour as thyself
Love is supreme
A sacrifice may win the giver a reward
Be on your own
Mother is mother

The idea is built around the theme. It is the developed

form of a theme on which a story takes shape. The theme does not automatically suggest a story but the idea contains a rough story plot and enables you to develop a story outline.

Collecting ideas can be great fun. I have found it is the most enjoyable part of creative writing. Look around for ideas, develop your power of observation. You should remain alert all the time and your eyes and ears should be ready to pick up ideas and register them.

Reading is the biggest source of ideas. Books, book-reviews, newspapers and magazines are splendid sources.

While you are reading a children's book your own idea may suddenly pop up. While looking through the daily newspapers something may strike you as curious and might give you an idea for a story. Whenever you come across such a news item, clip it out and put it in your idea book.

I once came across a newspaper story about a donkey who held up traffic on a narrow street. It was beaten up but would not move. Then a young boy offered a carrot to it and led it away. This was an interesting piece which I preserved in my idea book. Several years later I developed it into a picture book which I called *Donkey on the Bridge*.

Your own childhood experiences can be an important source of ideas. Advice which successful writers often give to beginners is: "Write only about what you know best." Try recalling significant events of your own childhood and develop them into interesting fiction.

Conversation is another useful source of ideas. If you meet an interesting person, engage him in conversation and listen to him intently, drawing him out as much as you can. After the encounter you may find that you are richer by a few ideas. A single small idea given by a friend may become the central idea for a full length novel. Talking to children would give you hundreds of ideas. Be friendly with them and try to hear their fanciful, imaginative stories. Often children tell tales of wisdom in their childlike manner.

Children's experiences are rich in appeal and provide ideas as well as model characters for your stories.

Look at your own surroundings. While looking for new ideas elsewhere, do not overlook your own surroundings. For instance, you may suddenly lose a gold ring. You start suspecting everybody in the house. You suspect your maidservant, her small child and even your dog. Then the maidservant's child finds your ring under your bed. This small idea can trigger your imagination and provide you a good plot for a short story.

Preserve your ideas. Ideas come to you when you travel, when you talk, when you read or often after you have a dream. To keep these ideas alive in your memory is not easy. The best way to preserve them is to note them down in a pocketbook which you can call 'My Idea Book.' Such a note book becomes an idea bank and gives you a sense of confidence in your own writing power. Never put your ideas down on loose bits of papers as you will probably not be able to find them again.

Once you have a good idea, you can build a plot around it, think of the main character, invent a set of other characters and place them in a setting you are familiar with.

Planning

You must plan out everything before you try to put your thoughts on paper. A proper plan makes writing easier as it gives you an opportunity to think about different aspects of your work.

The aspects which require your attention are:

— The main character, his age, physical appearance, other characteristics.

— You cannot build a story on your hero's soliloquies. The side characters are also important as they help to build up the story plot. Without them the main character cannot be brought to life.

— Decide on the setting of your story. You should be familiar with the kind of house or garden or locality which forms the back drop of your story. Your characters will not come alive in a setting unfamiliar to you.

— You should also think about time, season, location, clothing, names and other details. It is necessary to remain consistent in your story plan so that the names of characters, their clothing and the location appear credible to the reader. For example, you cannot make your character wear heavy clothing in summer in the Indian plains. Nor can you make characters in an Indian village eat western style food.

Spend some time and effort on these details in order to avoid inconsistencies. Think of the logical sequence of situations or events in your story and stick to this order.

Outline

Once you have a clear idea and have planned your story, it is time to make an outline. Outlining is only putting a larger text into a short concise form. It is necessary because working on a prepared outline is easier than working on a long manuscript. You can also organise your material more satisfactorily. In a shorter piece you can pick out errors readily as they are clearly visible and so can be easily amended. The situations in the plot can also be changed or interchanged easily.

Every story has a title and a body. You don't have to worry about the title in the beginning as you can work on it later. But the body—the outline of the story—contains a beginning, middle and an end. A short story can be based on one event, a single idea. A long story carries one central idea and many supporting ideas. In a novel each chapter carries one supporting idea and highlights one situation.

For a short magazine story, a rough outline is usually sufficient. But you must work on the outline until you are satisfied with it. The more time you spend on preparing your outline carefully, the less time you will spend when you write.

An outline can be in structural form or in a narrative form. Here is an example of what a structural form outline looks like:

Title: *Catching a Thief*

Body

Setting—Shopping Centre
Time —Afternoon

- I. Two shoe shine boys are talking about shop-lifting.
  - (a) One of them thinks shop-lifting is the easiest way to get things one desires.
  - (b) The other boy does not agree and believes that crime bears bitter fruit.
- II. A commotion in the shopping centre.
  - (a) A siren. Traffic stops. Police arrives.
  - (b) A shop-lifter has run away with a piece of jewellery.
- III. The thief is caught by the second shoe shine boy.
  - (a) A man comes to get his shoes polished.
  - (b) The shoe shine boy notices the strings of a necklace sticking out of his shoe.
  - (c) He quickly ties the shoe-laces of both shoes together.
  - (d) The man tries to walk away but falls down. Meanwhile, the boy calls the police and the thief is caught.
- IV. The two boys recount the event. While packing up for the day the first boy says to his friend, "I think I agree with you. Honesty is the best policy."

Here is a narrative form outline :

Title—Autograph

Mohan, a schoolboy is up early one morning. He is eager to get to school because a famous cricketer is visiting the school that day and Mohan is hoping to get an autograph. As Mohan takes out his bike, his mother comes out of the house with a packet. She asks Mohan to deliver it to an old lady who lives alone in a cottage down the road. Mohan takes the packet and bicycles down to the house. He knocks at the door and hears someone moaning in pain. He enters the house and finds the old lady lying on the floor, bleeding profusely from a cut on her forehead. Mohan washes her wound and helps her into bed. The lady asks him to fetch a doctor. The headmaster sees him. Mohan comes back with a doctor who gives her an injection. He asks Mohan to sit with her and not leave the lady alone for the next hour. Mohan has to stay but is thinking sadly about having missed the opportunity of a lifetime—meeting his cricketer hero. Suddenly he hears a commotion outside and he goes to see who is there. To his great surprise, he finds his hero, the cricketer on the doorstep along with the headmaster of the school.

Whichever type of outline you prefer, do put down the complete picture of what you have in mind. The outline must present the entire story in such a way that you can easily see all the aspects of the finished manuscript except the writing style. The outline must:

— establish the characters
— completely develop the plot
— describe each incident and each situation
— show how the story flows
— if the outline is of a long book, prepare a synopsis to show how the story flows from chapter to chapter
— also indicate the special feature of each chapter

The outline for a long book must be complete and detailed so that anyone who reads it (particularly the editor) can have a clear picture of the whole story. For a long book, a narrative outline is better, with the details in a condensed form and arranged chapterwise.

Plotting A Story

Once you have a theme, and have developed the outline of your story, plotting is the next important step. Good plot development is essential to good writing.

The plot is a plan of action to ensure well organised writing from the beginning to the end. A story is like a necklace of multicoloured beads which must be stringed in a pattern to present a pleasing effect. In a well plotted story, the character who plays the main role must take action to solve his problem, get out of a difficult situation to reach a certain goal.

The main character must struggle, must fight to get what he wants and to be happy and satisfied. More odds against his succeeding provide more suspense, more complications, more struggle until he reaches a moment when everything seems to be going against him and all seems lost. But somehow, suddenly the hero turns the tables on his adversaries and comes out in flying colours. He is the winner and an honest winner. A mere sequence of events alone does not provide a plot. To provide a good plot you must have a cause and an effect, a problem and a solution.

The best way to plot your story is to think out the beginning, middle, climax and end of the story. Do not start writing a story unless you know how it will end.

The Title

A title is important, though it is not an integral part of the story. Having a title from the very beginning helps to give your story a shape. When you are working on several projects it is easy to pick up a particular story which has a title.

A title should be eye-catching, effective and appealing.

An effective title must give a clue to what the story or the book is about but it should not reveal too much. Often, writers find it easy to use the name of the hero or heroine as the title of their book, but many prefer to give more intriguing titles.

I always keep a list of alternative titles for a story and go on adding to it. This gives me a choice and helps me select one — the most appealing and appropriate.

It is better to choose a title at the plotting stage. However, it can be changed as the story grows and you get new ideas and a better view of your story.

The Beginning

The beginning tells who the hero is and the time and place he finds himself in. It sets out the basic elements of the plot situations. The opening of the story is a show window and you should be able to catch your reader's interest with the first word. Every effort should be made to begin your story in a manner that the reader would want to carry on. The first few paragraphs have to be carefully developed, for, by reading these, the reader will determine whether he should continue with it.

If you examine the opening of popular classics, you will find the beginning effective and full of charm. The beginning can be handled in different ways and the story plot will determine how best to do it. You can begin with a long narrative, explaining in an interesting way the background of the story and thus preparing the environment. You can begin by providing information and details about the setting, time and the story characters. You can also begin with a dialogue between two or more characters. You can even begin by presenting one character thinking about something.

Yet another way, and a very effective one, is to open the story with action. If it is an adventure story or a story of an event try to plunge into the action as soon as possible. Either catch of 'mood' of the main character, or his 'action'. Old style 'once upon a time' beginnings are too hackneyed for modern fiction.

Introduce the main character as soon as possible. It is best to introduce the main character as soon as possible and let the reader identify with him. The story should be written from the viewpoint of the main character. In case the story has many characters, care must be taken to ensure that the supporting characters do not eclipse the main character. This aspect requires careful handling particularly in a short story.

Describe the setting and the atmosphere. The reader must know the time, place and other details so that the opening of the story creates the necessary impact on his mind. He must get the feel of the setting in a few crisp words. A brief introduction to set the mood can be effective.

Whatever way you decide to begin your story, you must not forget that you have to catch your reader's interest. Don't prolong the beginning by putting in unnecessary details. Your beginning must arouse excitement in your readers and grip their attention.

The Middle

The middle is the body or the backbone on which the story really stands. If it is weak the story will fall flat. The middle supplies details according to the outline. If there is no trouble there will be no story, so there should be appropriate complications, conflicts, problems to keep the young reader's interest alive.

The beginning leads the reader into the middle of the story. The beginning ends as soon as the main character is going to face the problem. You are now in the middle. The middle must lead the story smoothly into a climax where the interest of the reader is at its peak. This is the place in the story where you must show all the skill you can muster. The reader has read the earlier part of the story and would now expect emotional satisfaction. To provide this you must develop the climax scene in the most dramatic way possible. Your hero must be able to tackle his problem intelligently, forcefully and successfully, so that the story may end with a sense of achievement or be satisfying in some other way.

The End

The end is as important as the beginning and the middle. While the middle presents a problem and leads towards the climax, the end provides a solution to the problem.

It is very important that the end of a story leave a lasting impression on the reader. Your end must relieve the built-up tension in the climax scene by providing a solution. You should make it beautiful, impressive, and effective.

Often writers like to give a surprise ending to their stories. In fact an element of anticipation, hope or fear is more acceptable to children than a shock conclusion. The reader wants his story to have a satisfying completeness.

Necessary Elements of Children's Fiction

Characterization

Characterisation is like a spotlight, focussing the reader's attention and interest on a character and evoking an emotional response to the character.

Whether you write a fantasy or fiction of any kind, characters are important to bring life to your story. Unless your characters are portrayed convincingly and come alive your story will lack the necessary verse. Often the characters are so memorable that in the course of time the writers and the plots may be forgotten but not the characters. Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes and Charles Dickens' 'Oliver Twist are two such immortal characters.

In planning your story you should have a clear picture of all your characters so that they bear convincing characteristics. Any character you create must be down to earth and have the same emotions and feelings as an ordinary human being. After all, the emotions are universal.

The reader's interest in a story is sustained primarily through the characters. The real purpose of characterisation is to make the reader feel strongly towards the actor you are characterising.

Establish your characters: First think of the main character around whom the story is going to revolve. Just as, while writing a biography you have to have a personality sketch of your subject, while writing fiction, you need a personality sketch of your main character. You must show that your main character possesses motivation, an urge to do something and to occupy the centre of the stage when there is action. Behind every action the main character performs, there must lie a reason. If you give your character a strong motive, you characterize him as a strong character, one in whom the reader can take an active interest. If you give him a weak motive, you characterize him as a vague person and the reader will soon tire of him. Thus motivation becomes an indispensable ingredient to characterisation.

Hero and Anti-hero : You must knit the story plot around your main character in such a way that he must face a problem and eventually emerge the winner. Remember that a reader would want to cheer the hero and rejoice at his victory or circumstances. A young reader does not want his hero to be a mere passive observer or a philosophic type. Children usually dislike soliloquies because these do not permit any action to take place.

The main character should be alert, active, imaginative and a doer. The sparkle in his behaviour, his speech and his actions must show that he is the main character. This does not mean that he has only good qualities and never makes mistakes. He must be a normal person who has both good and bad qualities but his good qualities must predominate.

In the same way, the heroine of a story should have all the female characteristics. She may not be a beauty but in her thoughts and behaviour she must clearly show that she is female.

Anti-hero: An anti-hero is a character with negative qualities, who stands in contrast to a hero. He should never play the main role in a children's story. The basic characteristics of an anti-hero are lying, being cruel, cunning, dishonest or deceitful. If such an anti-hero plays the main role in any story, the young reader may find it difficult to identify with him and could get confused. Children learn very early to distinguish between the good and bad qualities in a person. They naturally want people to love rather than hate.

In old tales and folk tales, a giant symbolises the anti-hero and a witch symbolises the anti-heroine. These were usually introduced to create trouble for the heroine or the hero. These anti-heroines and anti-heroes represent evil and are eventually won over by the heroines and heroes presenting goodness.

Often writers experiment with anti-heroes. Sometimes they present a main character who has some anti-hero qualities. As the story develops, the main character turns over a new leaf and gives up his undesirable characteristics. The moral stories of the past were generally based on this theme.

For a beginning writer it is easier to portray a hero rather than an anti-hero. Once you have gained experience in writing and developed skill in dealing with your characters, it may be possible for you to have an anti-hero play the main role and, by the end of your story, turn into a better person.

The victory of the anti-hero in the end is not a welcome proposition in a story, for it would amount to the victory of evil over good. Ravan, the anti-hero in the *Ramayan* had to lose to the hero Ram, while Duryodhan, the anti-hero of the *Mahabharat* had to lose to the hero Arjun.

Take your models from life: Having created your main character, you need to develop personality sketches of other characters also. Careful thought should be given to their physical characteristics, temperament, the way they feel and react to different situations.

Observation is one way to look for possible characters. Keep a character notebook for jotting down the personality traits and oddities of interesting characters that you come across. If you have a child character in your story, get acquainted with a child of the same age and draw upon his personality. Children of different ages speak and behave differently and their reactions are also different. Take note of these differences, for it would look ridiculous if a child of eight were to speak like a toddler.

Enlarge your experience by reading: Reading books written by successful writers adds greatly to the experience of a writer. You have an idea for your story plot and have decided upon the age of your characters, try to study how other writers have dealt with similar characters. When you read, read critically, and notice every instance of characterisation in the material before you.

In developing your characters you should bear in mind that:

—A beginning writer, should select a normal child as his main character. Do not select a handicapped, seriously ill, mentally unbalanced or abnormal person with anti-hero qualities as your lead character. Characterisation of such persons requires experience and skill and should therefore, be experimented with later in your writing career.

—The shorter the piece of writing, the simpler the characterisation, should be.

—Characterisation should match the requirement of age of the reader. More details about characters are required for older age groups and in longer fiction. A short story for a tiny-tot does not demand much detail.

—Since stories spring primarily from characters you should make sure that your characters are consistent in their attitudes. Do not change the characteristics of the actors midway through a story. If a change of characteristics is unavoidable, introduce the change slowly and naturally.

Before you start writing, you must decide the characteristics of all your story characters thoroughly, even of the minor ones. Beginning writers often make their story characters do strange and inconsistent things in an attempt to make their story look different. This is a mistake because the story characters should remain convincing, acting as people in real life do.

Viewpoint

Viewpoint is the pulse of fiction. To keep your story flowing it is important to keep the pulse beating smoothly.

Often beginning writers find it difficult to understand what is meant by viewpoint in a story. Viewpoint is the angle of narration. It does not mean which person tells the story but through whose eyes the story is being looked at.

Viewpoint is the surest way of maintaining emotional suspense and of communicating the emotional quality of your story to the reader, whether the emotional pattern be simple or complex. The use of the right viewpoint can provide the reader with knowledge of different characters' reactions without the necessity for direct statement. By means of viewpoint, the writer can lead his reader through a series of emotional experiences gradually building up to the climax.

Every story is someone's story and it is always someone who is the main character. It is best if you can tell a story from the viewpoint of the main character. The story of the *Ramayan*, as for example, has been written from the viewpoint of Ram. He is the main character and it is through his heart and eyes that the writer feels and sees the world. The focus is on Ram, not on Dashrath or Lakshman or Sita. Since Ram is the hero, all the situations and characters only help to illustrate his character. The reader naturally shares the internal conflicts, thoughts and actions of the viewpoint character.

Had it been Sita's story, it would have had an entirely different perspective. The story might have then started with "Sita was the daughter of Janak" or "Sita was the wife of Ram". Thus Ram and other characters would have become secondary.

Once you have decided upon your main character, everything that happens in the story should then be presented through his or her eyes, feelings, senses and thoughts. Here is an example from a story:

"Meeta was out of breath by the time she reached the third floor. One more floor to go with this heavy basket of vegetables. She dumped the basket on the floor and leaned back against the wall to catch her breath. It was late already. Father must have arrived and her mother must be worried about her."

In the above passage the viewpoint is Meeta's and the writer leads his reader through Meeta's emotional experience.

For portraying your character successfully, the secret is to project yourself with the viewpoint character to find out how he feels, and then present those feelings to the reader.

Sir Walter Scott once wrote, "There is no heroic poem in the world but is at bottom a biography, the life of a man. The fiction writer must never relax from the truth of this statement."

A single viewpoint is the most successful means of sustaining the reader's interest in your tale. So you must make sure you are telling the story of one person. All other characters are relevant only because of their interaction with the main character. Let the whole story revolve around this central character. It is in him or her that the reader takes the greatest interest. It is with him that the reader identifies — laughing when he laughs, crying when he cries, right through to the end of the story.

Stories written in the first person have no viewpoint problems. The 'I' takes care of everything. The 'I', 'me' and 'my' of the first person make for the most effective and intimate approach. The 'I' indicates the viewpoint of the story character rightaway. 'I', the narrator, is free to think and describe what he thinks. At the same time it does present some problems. For example, 'I' cannot see everything himself. 'I' would either have to be present in all the scenes or else describe events at which he was absent through some other character who gives him the information. Thus, writing in the first person, though more intimate, has its limitations. After some practice in keeping to one viewpoint and writing in the first person, a beginning writer can later develop the ability to experiment with different ways of handling the viewpoint.

If you are writing in the third person and you find it difficult to maintain a single viewpoint, try writing your story in the first person and then transposing it into third person.

Shifting viewpoints in a short story can be awful because the reader finds it difficult to identify with any one character. Shifting viewpoints change the focus of narration and interrupt the flow of the story. The best safeguard against this is to introduce speech. Dialogue is a convenient device for presenting shifting viewpoints—the viewpoints of other characters can be introduced without obscuring the viewpoint of the main character. (The use of this technique is discussed in detail later in this chapter.)

Example: Different viewpoints

Holi is a major spring festival in North India. It falls on the first day of the Hindu calender (Saka) and heralds the onset of summer. People turn out in large numbers and apply colour to one another's face, throw coloured water on each other, offer sweets and greet foes and friends alike. Here is an example of different attitudes to the festival.

"The next day was Holi. Raju was trying out his new water-pistol when Mohan arrived.

'Preparing for tomorrow?' Mohan asked.

'Yes. I bought this water-pistol and it works well.' Raju filled it with water from a large tub. He pressed the water-pistol and water shot out in a stream.

'Raju, I find water balloons more handy. You just slip them in your pocket and no one knows what you are upto until it is too late.' Mohan said excitedly.

'Water balloons? Are you boys planning to buy some water balloons? I forbid it,' said Raju's mother sternly, 'water balloons are dangerous. They can hurt people.'

Meanwhile, Uncle Raj arrived. He took one look at the water-pistol and said angrily, 'These boys are mischief makers—I hate Holi.'

'Uncle Raj always pokes his nose into everything.' Raju mumbled, and the two boys slipped quickly out of the house."

Changing viewpoints are not easy to handle and it is better for the beginning writers to avoid them. At the same time keeping to one viewpoint in a short story can occasionally create difficulties. In case you really cannot help shifting the viewpoint, shift it in the narrative at the same time, thus safeguarding the smooth flow of the story. Never change the viewpoint merely to transmit information to the reader. Shifting of viewpoints as well as introducing information mars the smooth flow of the story. Before you decide to use more than one viewpoint, you have to decide whether the material of the story demands it and you really cannot avoid it.

Keeping to the viewpoint of the main character is easy in a short story where you have few changes of setting, situations and characters. But if you are writing a long piece of fiction for teenagers and you have to deal with different characters, their viewpoints, situations and settings as well as a sub-plot, you may find it difficult to avoid changing the viewpoint. This difficulty may also crop up if you write historical fiction.

One good way to handle this problem is to break the story into parts or chapters. The viewpoint of one character can easily be kept in one chapter and the viewpoint of another character can be projected in the following chapter. This arrangement can be used with advantage to enhance the position of the main character. Breaking the story into parts or chapters is also helpful in other ways. It gives the writer an opportunity to develop subsidiary plots which highlight the main story plot.

When you begin the story get your viewpoint character into his environment as quickly as possible. Have him see, hear and feel, smell and taste the environment around him. Bring him in when you start your story and end with him when you finish your story. He should be the one on whom the spotlight falls all the way.

Language for writing for children

To write well for children is to use words so true and simple that they create no obstacle to the flow of thought and feeling from mind to mind. Words are the only medium through which we can exchange thoughts even with ourselves. Words convey to us the names of things or actions, and it is through words that we perceive the events of the world.

To use words successfully, we need to keep our thinking and speaking under a certain discipline. It is important to know a large number of words, but it is more important to use them correctly, each with its appropriate meaning.

The power of rightly chosen words is great. There is no greater aid to clarity than a discreet economy of words, providing, of course, that the right words are used. Roundabout phrases should not be used where single words would serve.

Language study does not end with one's school days. You should revise your language habits from time to time in order to keep pace with changing customs. The only way to perfect your use of language is through the practice of writing. Writing and then rewriting, after a careful scrutiny, is a sure way to success.

The best language when writing for children is the spoken language. However a children's writer should bear in mind certain basic rules.

Consider the reader: The first essential is that the writer must have a deep sympathy for his reader and his limited capacity to understand. He must choose words which the reader will be sure to understand without much effort.

Write the way you talk: The most natural and the most intelligible language for writing in is the language used in every day conversation. The reader wants entertainment, not erudition. He would not like to pick up a dictionary again and again. Use single words and phrases that come

to you easily and naturally. The style will take care of itself.

Use correct language: As a writer you are expected to write correctly and effectively. Grammatical mistakes as well as other flaws in writing must be avoided. For correct usage of words use the help of a word-finder and a thesaurus.

Be sure of your spellings : When in doubt consult a dictionary. For your first draft you need not worry about spellings because frequent consultation of the dictionary will hamper your writing but once you have finished your draft and are reading it for the first time mark the words whose spellings you are doubtful of. Editors hate to see spelling mistakes.

Use the active voice: The active voice is more direct and vigorous than the passive.

Active — I shall always remember my first visit to Bombay.

Passive— My first visit to Bombay will always be remembered by me.

Place yourself in the background : The author's presence is unnecessary in fiction. Try to stay in the background. Do not inject your own opinions or generalisations into the story.

Avoid long winding explanations: Your choice of words should convey the mood without any need for further explanation. Do not strain to give information to the reader. All the information should come naturally and flow from the development of the story. Explanations and details can take your story astray.

Avoid long speeches in dialogue: Dialogue loses its charm if it becomes a series of long speeches, instead of a rapid exchange of ideas between characters.

Do not use dialect and slang: If you use dialect words which the reader does not understand, he will get irritated and put aside the book. If you must use dialect, use it sparingly. Dialect and slang is understood by limited audience. Surely you would want your books to be read by a wider audience.

Use similies and metaphors sparingly: If metaphors come in quick succession, the reader has to pause in order to understand them. This will distract him from enjoying the story.

Avoid words from foreign languages: Whichever language you are writing in, keep that language pure. Do not mix it with words from any other language, unless it is essential.

Use standard and conservative expressions and language: The reader will be more comfortable with standard language, standard spelling and standard usage. Trendy language and phrases do not appeal to everyone. Besides, like changes in fashions the use of such expressions keeps changing, whereas you would like your writing to remain understandable in the years ahead.

Use one tense, one person and one tone: If you are writing in the past tense, do not shift to present or future. If you are writing in the third person, do not shift to the first person. Keep your tone consistent.

Word usage: Omitting unnecessary words is as important as using appropriate words. Take out whatever you feel is extraneous. Weed out hesitant words and make definite statements, unless it is necessary to use non-committal expression. As the author you know if 'he did' or 'he didn't' for example—

"He seemed to think." Why 'seemed'?

"She probably knew." Remove 'probably'.

Such non-committal words however can be used to advantage in dialogue.

Sentences should never be overloaded in any way: Keep the age group of your audience in mind.

(a) *For very easy reading* experts recommend sentences of upto eight to ten words.
(b) *Relatively easy reading* calls for sentences of no more than eleven to fourteen words.
(c) *The standard length* of a sentence for eleven plus readers is seventeen to twenty words. Anything over that falls into the difficult category and is best avoided.

Do not repeat words or ideas: Repeated use of one word mars your style. A good way to master any language is to study synonyms—words that are similar yet not identical in meaning. Study the different shades of meaning expressed by the synonyms of a general word. For example, the word 'said' can be substituted by 'asserted', 'implied', 'assumed', 'insisted', 'suggested'. The repetition of an idea also makes the writing dull. Avoid it.

Whatever you write for children should be interesting and readily understood. Your success depends on your ability to express your thoughts in such a way that your writing makes for enjoyable reading.

Dialogue

Children are impatient by nature. Long drawn out stories tire them. They want their stories to grow fast. They want to turn the page quickly and find out what action takes place next.

I have observed many kids pick up books from library shelves. One of the first things they look for is quotation marks—the sign of dialogue. If they find the conversation interesting, filled with promise of exciting things to come, they decide to go ahead and read the book.

Dialogue is a good way to catch the attention of your readers. Through dialogue the characters plan, speak and act, bringing in an element of drama. Dialogue assists young readers in moving into the world of action and gives them a sense of participation.

The monotony of a narrative can be easily broken by dialogues. Through dialogue the story characters can speak out their own minds. Dialogue is also a useful medium of characterisation because it helps the readers to find out what traits you have given your characters. Dialogue in fiction means characterising not only the character speaking, but the character spoken to, and the character spoken about. If handled skillfully, dialogue can breathe life into the characters.

Here are the chief advantages of dialogue:

—to highlight the real characteristics of story characters
—to create suspense
—to show the emotional state of the character
—to quicken the action
—to further the action of the plot, that is, build the story
—to convey needed information
—to bring in the illusion of reality
—to bring in many viewpoints without disturbing the viewpoint of the main character
—to break the monotony of narration

Here are some examples of dialogue from old classics, showing the use of dialogue for the growth of story and for characterisation.

To convey the narrator's own views
(The passage is from *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte)

"Is it all over?" she asked, looking down at my face. "Have you cried your grief away?"

"I am afraid I shall never do that."

"Why?"

"Because I have been wrongly accused, and you, ma'am, and everybody else will now think me wicked."

"We shall think you what you prove yourself to be, my child. Continue to act as a good girl, and you will satisfy me."

"Shall I, Miss Temple?"

"You will," said she, passing her arm round me. "And now tell me who is the lady whom Mr. Brocklehurst called your benefactress?"

"Mrs. Reed, my uncle's wife. My uncle is dead, and he left me to her care."

"Did she not, then, adopt you of her own accord?"

"No, ma'am, she was sorry to have to do it; but my uncle, as I have often heard the servants say, got her to promise before he died, that she would always keep me."

"Well now, Jane, you know, or at least I will tell you, that when a criminal is accused, he is always allowed to speak in his own defence. You have been charged with falsehood; defend yourself to me as well as you can. Say whatever your memory suggests as true, but add nothing and exaggerate nothing."

To show kindness and affection between two people
(From *Jane Eyre*)

"How are you tonight, Helen? Have you coughed much today?"

"Not quite so much I think, ma'am."

"And the pain in your chest?"

"It is a little better."

Miss Temple got up, took her hand and examined her pulse; then she returned to her own seat; as she resumed it, I heard her sigh low. She was pensive a few minutes, then rousing herself, she said cheerfully:

"But you two are my visitors tonight; I must treat you as such." She rang the bell.

To give information about the other character
(The passage is from *Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens)

"Did she say any more, Anny dear, while I was gone?" inquired the messenger.

"Not a word," replied the other. "She plucked and tore at her arms for a little time; but I held her hands, and she soon dropped off. She hasn't much strength in her, so I easily kept her quiet. I ain't so weak for an old woman, although I am on parish allowance; no, no!"

"Did she drink the hot wine the doctor said she was to have?" demanded the first.

"I tried to get it down," rejoined the other. "But her teeth were tight set, and she clenched the mug so hard that it was as much as I could do to get it back again. So I drank it; and it did me good!"

To show different views
(From *Oliver Twist*)

"What's the matter here?" said Fagin, looking round.

"The girl's gone mad, I think," replied Sikes, savagely.

"No, she hasn't," said Nancy, pale and breathless from the scuffle; "no, she hasn't, Fagin; don't think it."

"Then keep quiet, will you?" said the Jew, with a threatening look.

To tell about a person's personality

"But why don't you go?"

"Ma would never agree to the idea."

"Shall I ask Ma?"

"Oh, no, she would only begin to cry."

To show suspense

"Did you see the light over there? It has gone now."

"I didn't see. But I can hear the whistle."

"Look over there, the blinking light."

"Yes, I can see. Now the whistle."

"This whistle also followed by another."

"The sound comes from the side of the blinking light. There is some connection."

To show emotion

(a) "What made you come to my office today?" demanded Nita.

"Only you," said Mithun softly.

"But I can't come with you at this time," Nita said awkwardly.

"With great difficulty I managed to take today off because I want to see you."

(b) "Why are you dancing and jumping?"

"Today, the teacher read my essay out in the class, because it was the best of the lot," said Sheela and she danced a whole circle with her notebook in her hands.

To show opinion

At last Mr. Dance finished the story.

"Mr. Dance," said the squire, "you are a very noble fellow. And as for riding down that black, atrocious miscreant, I regard it as an act of virtue, Sir, like stamping on a cockroach. This lad Hawkins is a brump, I perceive. Hawkins, will you ring that bell? Mr. Dance must have some ale."

To quicken the action

(This is the opening passage of *Charlotte's Web* by E.B. White)

"Where's Papa going with that axe?" said Fern to her mother as they were setting the table for breakfast.

"Out to the hoghouse," replied Mrs. Arable. "Some pigs were born last night."

"I don't see why he needs an axe?" continued Fern, who was only eight.

"Well," said her mother, "one of the pigs is a runt. It's very small and weak, and it will never amount to anything. So your father has decided to do away with it."

"Do away with it?" shrieked Fern, "you mean kill it? Just because it's smaller than the others?"

For effective use of the device of the dialogue here are some suggestions:

—Listen carefully and learn to adapt spoken language to your own fictional needs. If you come across a talkative child or an interesting person, notice how and what he speaks. You could model your next story character on him.

—Notice the choice of words or the tempo at which they were spoken.

—Boys have a definitely masculine way of expressing themselves and girls express themselves in a clearly feminine manner. They react differently to different situations.

—The sensitive loving mother should not speak like the bold and often rough father. Children should speak like children do. Youngsters who speak like adults would sound unnatural and out of place.

—Try not to use foreign slang or regional dialect but if it is necessary, research it thoroughly and become truly familiar with it. It can often add local flavour to your narrative and contribute to its authenticity. On the other hand it may restrict your readership to those who understand the dialect if you use it too indiscriminately.

—Good dialogue makes the reader feel as though he hears it, and makes him believe in its reality.

—No story character should talk too long without a break. If a character wants to convey something in detail, see that his speech is broken down from time to time with a question, a comment, a pause or laughter.

—The story must grow, through the dialogue. No matter how charming and amusing the conversations you devise are, unless these advance the plot they have no place in the story.

—Often there is no need to repeatedly use the word 'said.' You can write dialogue without it.

—Read your dialogues aloud and see whether the words sound natural on the tongue. Pick out the flaws and correct them.

While using dialogue bear in mind that no two persons use the same vocabulary. Each character uses his own individually chosen words and his speech depicts not only his thoughts but also his mood and other aspects of his character. The purpose of dialogue is to provide a sense of movement making the text crisp and appealing. Writing long speeches, or forcing words into the mouth of a character detracts from the purpose of dialogue.

Develop an ear for dialogue, both by reading it and by listening to people talk. Read some plays. The dramatist is entirely dependent on the spoken word to carry the action on.

Case Story

Autograph

Early in the morning Mohan got ready. He was excited because a famous cricketer was coming to his school. Mohan, as captain of the school cricket team had been chosen to lead the reception committee. Besides, he wanted the guest's autograph. Carefully, he slipped his autograph book into his pocket and rushed through his breakfast. As he got onto his bike, his mother handed him a paperbag saying,

"On your way to school, just deliver this fruit to Bari Amma."

"At this time? But I'm in a hurry Ma! I have to get to school very early. I promise I'll deliver the fruit later."

"But Bari Amma is ill. She is old and all alone and she needs the fruit today. You must understand," mother shot back sternly.

Mohan took the bag reluctantly and looked at his watch. It was five minutes to eight, and the cricketer was to reach the school at nine. But the old lady's cottage was not far. Perhaps he could make it there and on to the school in time.

Mohan pedalled swiftly down the road and in a short time reached the cottage. Hurriedly, he opened the gate, crossed the garden, jumped up the steps and knocked on the door. He knocked again, but there was no reply. He pushed the door open, peeped in, and called, "Is anyone there?"

A faint voice groaned, "I'm here child."

Mohan entered the adjoining room and was shocked to see the old lady lying on her back bleeding from a cut on her forehead. Mohan dropped the bag of fruit on the table and helped the old lady to her bed. As she sank down he picked up a towel, soaked it in water and gently cleaned the bleeding cut. The lady closed her eyes and groaned, "Get the doctor please."

Mohan rushed out of the cottage to get a doctor but he didn't know where to go. He thought he would ask some neighbour. Suddenly he heard a voice call.

"Mohan, what are you doing here?"

Mohan turned and found the headmaster of his school, "Sir, an old lady is badly hurt and.... she needs a doctor."

"But you are leading the reception committee. You should have been at the school by this time."

Mohan explained everything to the headmaster.

"Sir, as soon as the doctor comes, I shall be there."

The headmaster pointed to the next building. "The gentleman staying in flat No. 6 is a doctor. He leaves for his clinic at 8.30. Hurry up boy, you may still catch him. But, you must reach the school as early as possible."

"Thank you Sir," said Mohan and ran up to the flat.

Mohan found the doctor ready to leave. He told him what had happened and the doctor agreed to accompany him to see Bari Amma.

The doctor examined the old lady and dressed her cut, then gave her an injection and a tablet. Mohan brought a glass of water and helped Bari Amma swallow the tablet. Before leaving, the doctor said to Mohan,

"Well, boy, you will have to keep an eye on her. Don't let her get up. She must have complete rest."

"Doctor! But I have to go to school."

"But you cannot leave her in this condition," the doctor asserted.

Mohan sat down on the chair next to the bed brooding over his plight. He wished he could reach his school. Then he saw the old lady open her eyes.

"How are you Bari Amma? Are you better? Can I leave now?"

"My son, stay with me for some more time. My nephew should be here any minute. Aa....h," the lady groaned and closed her eyes.

Mohan stood by the window sadly. The clock struck ten. The function must be over. He had not been able to make it and the headmaster would be greatly annoyed with him. He had missed a big chance to get a coveted autograph. He wished that the old lady's nephew would come soon. She was fast asleep, so perhaps he could slip away quietly. But the doctor had asked him not to leave her alone. He must wait until her nephew came. Mohan felt restless and looked out of the window at the deserted road.

Suddenly there was a noise outside. He wondered what it could be. He went to the window and saw a crowd making for the cottage. To his surprise Mohan saw that the headmaster was one of the crowd. A young man suddenly slipped out of the crowd and opened the gate.

The young man walked in to Bari Amma's house and said to Mohan, "I am the old lady's nephew. Sorry I couldn't make it earlier. I had gone to see the cricketer and we have brought him with us." Mohan couldn't believe his eyes when in walked his hero, a smile on his face.

The headmaster followed him in and introduced Mohan to the cricketer, "Here is Mohan, our team captain."

"Oh, is he the boy you were talking about?"

"Yes."

"Sorry, I couldn't receive you at the school," Mohan said.

"I learnt that you were held up and so I have come to see you," the cricketer replied.

Mohan promptly took his autograph book out of his pocket. The cricketer drew the outline of a cricket bat and wrote the words, "MOHAN, I ADMIRE YOU" in it.

Mohan's eyes were all aglow.

"Thank you very much. It will be my most cherished autograph."

"We have come to take you out for lunch with us. Hurry up," said the headmaster.

Story Analysis

I now present an analysis of the case story "Autograph". I have chosen this story because I know each of its parts and how these have developed.

I used this theme for the story: "A sacrifice made for another person may reap the giver a rich reward."

I developed the theme into an idea by introducing a cricketer who would catch the interest of young readers instantly. Children in India are very interested in the game of cricket. Boys and girls hero worship cricketers. The main character in the story, Mohan, is a young boy. As the story is intended for children of the school going age, I decided to choose a schoolboy for the main character, with whom young readers could identify readily.

The plot unfolds smoothly, introducing the main character, the time and the setting.

"Early in the morning Mohan got ready. He was excited because a famous cricketer was coming to his school. Mohan, as captain of the school cricket team, had been chosen to lead the reception committee. Besides, Mohan wanted the guest's autograph. Carefully he slipped his autograph book into his pocket and rushed through his breakfast."

Upto this point the main character has only one aim, one wish — to get the autograph.

At this point introducing a problem for the main character would heighten the reader's interest. "As he got on his bike, his mother handed him a paper bag saying, 'On your way to school, just deliver this fruit to Bari Amma.'

'At this time? But I'm in a hurry, Ma! I have to get to school very early. I promise I'll deliver the fruit later.'

'But Bari Amma is ill. She is old and all alone, and she needs the fruit today. You must understand,' mother shot back sternly."

Faced with the problem, at first Mohan tries to avoid it. But when he finds that his mother is insistent that he carry the fruit, he begins to find ways of resolving his problem. He looks at his watch and quickly decides that he can still make it to school in time.

The story could have developed without any further complication, but in that case it would have been robbed of challenge. Therefore, it was necessary to create a complication which would not permit him to get to school in time. He finds the old lady lying on the floor with a bleeding cut on her forehead. He reacts to the situation as all right thinking children should be encouraged to do. He gives priority to an injured, helpless person and resists the strong temptation to fulfil his long cherished wish. You will see there is a message built into the story and the treatment makes the main character heroic.

"Mohan rushed out of the cottage to get a doctor but he didn't know where to go. He thought he would ask some neighbour. Suddenly he heard a voice call.

'Mohan, what are you doing here?'

Mohan turned and found the headmaster of his school.

'Sir, an old lady is badly hurt and....she needs a doctor.'

'But you are leading the reception committee. You should have been at school by this time?'

Mohan explained everything to the headmaster.

'Sir, as soon as the doctor comes, I shall be there?'

The headmaster pointed to the next building, 'The gentleman staying in flat No. 6 is a doctor. He leaves for his clinic at about 8.30. Hurry up, boy, you may still catch him.'

Mohan rang the bell at No. 6. The doctor was just going out. Mohan told him what had happened, and the doctor went with him to see Bari Amma. The doctor examined the old lady and dressed her cut, then gave her an injection and a tablet. Mohan brought a glass of water and helped Bari Amma swallow the tablet.

'Well, boy, you will have to keep an eye on her. Don't let her get up. She must have complete rest.'

'Doctor! But I have to go to school'."

Mohan is a young boy with all the strength and weaknesses of someone of his age. It would be unnatural for him not to be disappointed. For the second time, a conflict develops

in his mind. On the one hand he wants to run off to school, on the other hand the doctor has asked him not to leave the old lady alone. He decides to stay on. The chain of events would seem to come to an end at this point and the story would conclude, but without providing any satisfying end. The plot would remain trivial and would not illustrate the theme which had initially impelled me to begin writing this story.

A new turn of events has, therefore, to be introduced. To be able to do so, a new character, the nephew of the old lady, is slipped in.

"My son, stay with me for some more time. My nephew should be here any minute, Aa....h", the lady groaned and closed her eyes.

The new turn is provided by the nephew coming to the cottage, along with the famous cricketer.

The headmaster of the school had already been introduced earlier in the story, thus providing a natural link. Appreciating Mohan's predicament the headmaster had persuaded the cricketer to come and see Mohan and then go out for lunch with him.

This scene provides a climax to the story and also fulfils Mohan's dream. The end is satisfying and leaves the reader with a sense of fulfilment. The end does not spring too much of a surprise on the reader and smoothly flows out of the story. The moral of the story clearly shows up, without being forced on the reader.

Writing full length fiction

Once you have published some short stories, you are ready to try your hand at full length fiction. Full length fiction offers greater scope for your creative talents, permits more word space and hence greater freedom for experimentation. A short story for a magazine is usually short-lived whereas a good book may run into several editions and even get translated into different languages. Besides, a book brings recognition and establishes you as an author.

Writing a short story of upto 3000 words usually takes a few days but a full length story of 25,000 words or more can take many months to finish. A short story can be a one incident story based on a simple theme with very few characters. In a long story you have to develop a main theme and several secondary themes, using a much larger cast of characters. In a short story, the main character is usually introduced in the beginning and is almost immediately faced with a problem which he sets out to resolve. In a book, the stage must first be set, then the main character introduced and faced with a difficult situation. Quite evidently, there are numerous scenes to be depicted and a lot of freedom about use of word space. As a beginning writer you may be awed by the magnitude of the task, but this should not trouble you unduly for it is part of the fun of writing a book.

Planning a Book

Book idea: First, you have to look for an idea which can hold the weight of a book length story. A single event cannot be stretched into full length fiction. Mere narration of random incidents without a strong theme to bind them together does not make a book either. A book needs much more than a trivial idea — the central idea has to be a strong one. Your idea could be taken from realistic situations, it could be a mystery story, a fantasy or a biography, or fiction based on historical events.

Age Group: Your book could either be junior fiction for the 9 to 12 age group or fiction for the teenager. If you decide to write for juniors, spoken language will be most appropriate. School based stories, simple mysteries, adventure and humour are favoured subjects for this age group. Boys of this age do not usually like to read stories about girls even though the girls do not mind reading boy's stories. For wider appeal it is advisable to have both girls and boys in your stories.

Teenagers on their way to becoming young adults do not like to read junior fiction but are fond of stories based on their own pastimes and dealing with their own problems. The writing is closer to adult fiction than to junior fiction. The teenage fiction themes knitted around romance and adventure are welcome. Use of spoken language is not an essential requirement.

Time span for your story: Once you have an idea and the age group in mind, you have to think about the length of time your story will cover. It is best to have a short time span so that the main character, if he is a child, remains a child to the last. One year or a few years is time enough for your story to take place in.

Main character and other characters: In a child oriented story your main character should be a child of the reader's age or should be a little older than the reader. The main character must never be younger than the reader. Think about your main character. Visualise his physical appearance and other characteristics. He shoud behave like a child and speak and act like a child. Do not make your main character into an angel. He should possess bad and good qualities, like any other human being. This will help the reader identify with him easily.

Once your main character comes alive in your mind, think of the characters who are going to surround him. They could be other children or even adults.

Setting and background: Now that you have the essentials of your story worked out, it is time to think about the setting and the background. Your story could have the same setting from beginning to end or it could change, provided the change is brought in as an organic part of the plot. Whatever setting and background you choose for your story, make sure you know it well because in attempting to sketch an unfamiliar background, you are bound to make mistakes. Select familiar surroundings, a city you know, a familiar pattern of house, so that your writing is not impeded in any way. Nothing irritates a reader more than a feeling that the author has not done his homework.

Be sure of your facts: You must be sure of your facts howsoever small or insignificant these might be. Whenever you have doubts, do some preliminary research before sitting down to write. Imagination alone will not compensate for a lack of facts. Take only those facts which are commonly known and believable.

Preliminary thinking about your story: Think about your book for some time, let your mind keep working on it even when you are busy doing something else. Let your imagination explore the facets of your story and let the story idea become an obsession with you. When you come to bursting point take pen and paper and prepare an outline.

Outline: Your outline should be in narrative form and it should provide a complete picture of your plot. Write down your outline in such a way that your characters are established, and the main character shows up clearly. The outline must also contain a completely developed plot. It should describe all major incidents and situations. The whole book must appear in a condensed form in your outline, except for the writing style and minor situations.

Title: You might, by this time, have chosen a title for your story. If not, do so now. If you are dissatisfied you can always change it later. A title gives an identity to your story and provides a name under which to file your material. If you are still unsure of the title and different ones strike you now and then, keep noting them down. This will help you to select the most appropriate one.

Prepare a synopsis of each chapter: Once you have a complete outline of your story, you should divide your material into chapters and prepare a synopsis of each chapter. Every chapter must be based on some important event and the synopsis must present the event and the characters involved. You can do a lot of juggling at this stage, if necessary. Often, an incident that seemed to fit best into your opening chapter, can prove to belong somewhere else. Juggle to your hearts content. The more you experiment, the more likely it is that you will come up with the best possible arrangement of your material. Preparing a chapter by chapter synopsis is a tiring job but it will save you time, stress and drudgery in the actual writing of your story.

Naming your characters: As soon as you name your characters, you will find that they begin to come alive. You start knowing them and your acquaintance grows each day. You know how they think, how they react to different situations and how your main character will relate to them. In the naming of your character, bear in mind that:

- No two names should sound alike or begin with the same alphabet
- the name should suit the age of the characters, the period and the place.

Actual writing: Once your preliminary preparations are made you are ready to carry out your big venture — the writing of your full length fiction.

It is important that before you start writing you must develop enough confidence in yourself. You may still be shaky about starting a book. "Take the plunge and get on with the job" is the best advice anyone can give you at this stage. Think of yourself as a unique individual, the only person who can write the way you write. No one else thinks like you, no one else observes exactly as you do and no one will express an idea, a viewpoint, an emotion, the way you will. Your originality will stand by you.

Writing schedule: Try to keep to a fixed writing schedule. Do not miss a single day. Endeavour to add some text every day, even if it is only a few lines. Write as fast as you can. Do not turn back to read your text until you have finished. Just keep on writing. Get it done, no matter how, before you turn back to revise. The momentum of your writing should not be broken. The temptation of going back before you are finished is strong but no writer can afford to give in to it. Else, you may find yourself revising your manuscript for months and years to come, without finishing your book at all.

Since you cannot write your whole book in a single day, you will find these suggestions practicable. It is often helpful to finish each day's writing when you are in the middle of a chapter. Stop your day's work while you are still anxious to write the next page and you know what you want to say next. This will help you to pick up the threads from where you left off on the previous day. If you try to start a new chapter the following day, you may often find it difficult to begin at all — it takes time to build up momentum for writing. The thoughts of the previous day, however, can help you plunge rightaway into the writing of the unfinished chapter and then you can go on to the next one.

New ideas and situations: In the process of writing many small ideas and situations pop up. Be very careful with them. Never let these ideas draw you out of the boundaries of your story. At the same time do not lose them. Note them down on a slip of paper and pin it on the page on which you want to actually use the idea. These last minute ideas may give your story more colour and added fragrance.

"Cooling off" after the first draft: It is a big day when you finish the first draft of your book. Take a break, relax. Use this time to "cool off."

Cooling off is as important as the actual writing. It is a must before you take up your book again. Do not touch the manuscript for a week or several weeks, until you have been able to get out of the 'spell' of your book. You must be completely cured of your 'book fever'. Try writing some short stories during this period or plan out another book. This will help you keep your mind off the work at hand.

The "cooling off" period sharpens your ability to read your own script dispassionately, objectively and critically. It helps you to become a 'third person' and discover the strength and weaknesses of your work.

Revising and polishing: The first draft of your book is only the foundation. It is re-writing that turns a piece of writing into a real book. You have already created an original piece. Now you are ready to revise, edit and polish your manuscript.

Writing a Picture Book Story

A picture book story is meant for very young children. It really comes to life when supplemented with illustrations. The story is so designed that children can either read it on their own or it can be read to them. It should be clear, simple, effective and original. Jean and Alan Tucker write in their essay, "Reading for Enjoyment for 6-9 Year old":

"Picture books have short stories made into complete books, whose large type and well spaced pages with illustrations give the reader confidence to persevere to the end that moment of glory: 'Mummy I have read a book'."

Writing for early readers requires all the skills of good writing, with emphasis on the ability to think visually and create an impact on young minds.

Picture books can be designed in different ways. The text can be short or long depending on the subject matter, its presentation and the age group for which it is meant. It can be fantasy, an animated story or a real life story. Picture book stories seem deceptively simple but it is a hard task to write a good one.

Apart from a knowledge of the basic techniques of writing for children, a writer has to meet the special requirements of the young reader, who has a small vocabulary and whose world is limited to his immediate environment.

Writing for a tiny tot: A tiny tot falls into the 'look listen-learn' age group. He likes to handle a book but is neither a reader himself nor a patient listener. His capacity for retention is limited to a few minutes. His world is still limited to his parents, home, and immediate environment. He is interested in simple stories based on realistic incidents. Nursery rhymes, nonsense verse and tongue twisters in his own mother tongue fascinate him immensely. Words and sounds play a special part in writing for this age. Long descriptions and detail tire the young listener and must be avoided altogether.

A tiny tot between one and three years of age is not interested in fantasies as his imagination has not begun to fly beyond his familiar world. A single experience or one incident can be developed into a charming story. Remember that the ending must be a happy one.

As a child grows his imagination begins to develop, he understands simple fantasy though his imagination is still limited to the immediate world around him. Folktales which have only a few characters — people or animals — and a simple plot or animated fable-like stories are great favourites with children between three and six years of age. Words and sounds are still important for them. Prose interspersed with some verse makes them happy and provides great enjoyment. Stories for this age group should be kept simple and uncomplicated.

Writing for the 6-9 age group: A child of this age can read and retain ideas, has more imagination and greater powers of understanding. If you decide to write for this age you have to make a choice about whether you wish to write a "Read Aloud" story for the young listener or an "I can Read a Book" story for the beginner reader. The requirements are somewhat different, but in both cases the story must come alive at the beginning and be interesting enough for the reader to go on with it. This is easily achieved by introducing action, and using the device of dialogue to stimulate his excitement.

Writing for the beginner reader

A beginner reader has limitations and the writer would do well to understand these fully.

(a) *Language:* A beginner reader has very limited reading skill. He knows only a few words, so you have to work within a limited vocabulary. After all heavy boulders cannot be carried in a small basket. Your aim is to provide a pleasant experience to the reader, which is possible only if he is able to follow the story all by himself.

(b) *Theme:* Your young reader has just started to apply himself, and will have problems in understanding and retaining the story idea. The theme should, therefore, be simple and remain within his comprehension.

(c) *Message:* The story should carry a message. Love, honesty, understanding and truthfulness are some of the universal messages which can be built into it.

(d) *Plot:* The plot must be knitted around a simple, understandable theme. Children like to have recognizable settings and characters and uncomplicated plots. The young reader will not go on reading by himself unless he enjoys the book and wishes to find out what's next.

(e) *Childhood appeal:* Children love child oriented stories and find it easy to identify with characters of their own age. It is best to let a child character play the main role in the story. In animal stories too children appreciate the presence of cubs, kittens and other young ones.

(f) *Scope for Illustration:* In picture books, illustrations are often more important than the text. A story should have a variety of situations which provide the illustrator plenty of scope to show off his skills. If your entire story takes place within the four walls of one room, the visuals will all end up very much the same. The illustrator will not be able to bring much needed variety to his art work. The situations in the story must, therefore change, keeping in view the needs of the illustrator.

(g) *Make a happy story:* The child seeks happiness in his book. He is sensitive and emotional and looks for security and love. Stories about runaway children or orphans, do not provide happy situations. A child of this age should not be exposed unnecessarily to cruelty and unhappiness. If a child is lost, he must be reunited with his parents in the end.Only happy endings can provide a satisfying experience to the reader.

Writing for the child listener: Writing read aloud stories is relatively easier. The presence of an adult who reads the story to a child is a great help both to the writer and the child listener. He becomes a bridge between the two and provides an opportunity to the writer to use expanded vocabulary and somewhat complex plots.

As the child listens to the story, he explores a wide new world through the writer's imagination and his own. Often, he enjoys the story without even looking at the pictures. He learns new words and forms his own images of what these words represent. The experience helps him to grow into a child reader, who would eventually want to read a book all by himself.

For a good picture book:

—There should be a definite plot or a significant happening that would interest children.

—The story should be entertaining and written in an attractive manner.

—It should possess childhood appeal, drama, warmth, humour and above all its own dignity.

—The story should add to a child's joy through words and sounds.

—The main character should be introduced as soon as possible.

—Side characters should help to build up the main character and not steal the limelight from him.

—The main role should never be played by an anti-hero.

—The main character must be faced with a problem or difficulty which he resolves eventually.

—The end must provide a happy solution to the problem and the hero must always win.

What you should avoid

* Difficult words

* Too many characters
* A complex plot
* Flashbacks
* Similies and metaphors
* Too many details
* Sermons
* Many viewpoints
* Lack of action
* Moralising

Many years ago when I first began to write picture book stories, a fellow writer gave me a useful tip. He said, "Look for some good picture books in bookshops, school libraries, private collections or wherever else you can get them." Since picture book publishing is still in its infancy in India you will have to make a serious effort to find good picture books. Study these picture books and select the ones you particularly like. They might suggest a plot to you or give you ideas about how to present your plot. The study of picture books will also suggest the likely length of the text and show you how the author has kept in view the possibilities for illustration. Make reading of new picture books a habit if you wish to specialise in this field. This will enable you to keep in touch with current writing trends and to understand editorial requirements.

Writing A Biography

Biography is a popular and rewarding form of writing. It is a true story of an adult who has achieved greatness and whose deeds are worth remembering. You may come across the story of a person and his achievements which is so fascinating that you would like to know more about him and tell others, too. Instantly you have the raw material before you, which your talent can turn into an interesting piece of writing. If you have found something new, some little known facts or if you have a different approach to your subject you can write a biographical story.

Children love real life stories. Parents and teachers like children to read biographies and publishers are pleased to publish them. Biographies are always in demand and a great advantage is that they are rarely outdated.

A biography is based upon facts. Good research work is, therefore essential before undertaking the task of writing one. If the research is deep and honest, you will have ample material to develop a fascinating study of your subject.

Selection of a subject: While leafing through a magazine or book you may come across some information about an extraordinary person, which triggers your curiosity. Try to find out more about this person. If your research reveals some unusual achievements or a life spent in making a real contribution to the world, you have found the subject of your biography. While selecting your subject keep in mind the availability of material about the person. Avoid writing about someone belonging to the distant past because it is often difficult to get facts about him.

Try to choose someone who belongs to your own country. There are advantages in doing so. Firstly, you can get material about him or her more easily. Secondly, a publisher of your own country is unlikely to publish a biography about a person who lived in a distant land.

Intensive research for the material: Once you have selected your subject, you have to collect as many facts and incidents connected with the person's life and achievements as you can. It is important to look for anecdotes and incidents which would interest children in some way. Collect facts from all the available sources and be sure of your dates. You should have at least three different sources with which to check the authenticity of the collected material. While you are reading up on your hero be careful to note down the title of the book or article, periodical or newspaper, the page number and the date of issue of the publication you are referring to. Keep the source material handy so that you are able to recheck if necessary. Sometimes, an editor may ask you for reference material.

Selection of incidents: Once you are satisfied with your research work and have enough material on your subject's life, examine it thoroughly. Select those incidents which will bring out the individual's personality and enliven his character. Choose incidents of human interest and don't forget to pick some which have an element of humour. Humour could result from a queer habit of your subject, or a peculiar relationship he has with a friend or relative. Your subject's relationship with friends and family is as important as his achievements because you are trying to write about the human being your hero was and not about a flat, one-dimensional public figure.

Arrange collected material: After you have gathered all the facts and incidents, arrange them chronologically. This arrangement itself will suggest the rough structure of your biography. You can now prepare an outline of your biography and divide your material into chapters. Let each chapter be based on a major incident which had helped to shape the individual's life pattern. Follow all the rules of writing fiction for children discussed in earlier chapters. If you are writing the biography of a living person, it should start with his birth and should end with his current activities. And if it is the biography of a dead hero, then it should tell his story from birth to death. Flashbacks do not usually have a place in a biography.

You can give your biography one of two types of treatment. One is factual and the other is fictional.

Factual biography is a straightforward account of a person's life and the events which shaped it. The story of the subject is told in an interesting way, with accuracy as to dates and events. To add authenticity, photographs are often included in factual biography. In olden times biography was nothing but a flat record of facts and events arranged chronologically, with the result that it tended to be dull and unentertaining.

With the passage of time, the concept of biography has changed. Factual biography, which is easy to write but does not make interesting reading, has given place to fictional biography.

Ordinary fiction is a story which did not really happen; a fictional biography is a more interesting project, based on actual happenings but turned into an entertaining narrative through use of certain techniques of fiction writing. But in fictional treatment, there is always the risk that either the factual element or the element of fiction will suffer at the hands of the biographer. It is often difficult to keep a balance between the two. However, the writer should make an attempt to do so.

Preparing to write: As a biographer one recognises that good biographies cannot be written in haste. It is not enough to martial an army of facts about the subject's life. One must also sincerely admire him. The biographer has to merge his own identity with his subject. Get under the skin of your subject. Enter the period he belonged to, acquaint yourself with his times and look for his human qualities. The biographer has to "live" with his hero to know him well. He need not be overawed by the subjects public image. He will have to discover the real person underneath the mask of public adulation, with all his frustrations, emotions, joys and griefs. Reading biographies of the subject's contemporaries or even other fiction of that period is helpful.

Spoken record and, if possible, personal correspondence which you can use in your text, possibly in the form of dialogue can be of great use. Dialogues bring the subject alive, break the monotony of narration and increase the reader's interest. Keep the following points in mind:

— Do not address your reader directly.

— Select only those incidents and events from your subject's life which help to shape his character. Leave out details and incidents which do not contribute to developing an overall perspective of the life and work of the subject.

— Do not unnecessarily focus on the weaknesses of the individual howsoever interesting these may appear to you. Your purpose is to present a subject whom the young reader will wish to emulate.

— You must honestly admire the person you choose to write about. That alone will bring the flavour of sincerity to the biography.

— The story of the hero should usually be told from childhood through to adulthood, revealing in the process how he developed into a unique personality. Therefore, the story should always grow straight and the chronology of events be maintained.

Actual writing : Once you have a synopsis and have arranged your material chronologically you are ready to start writing.

The opening paragraph must arrest the young reader's attention. You could open with an interesting incident from your subject's early life. Some writers like to open a biography by creating a backdrop of the time when the subject was born. Introducing the family of the subject helps to create emotional appeal and brings a human touch to your writing.

Having begun in an interesting way, carefully enter the middle of the story, describe the challenges your subject faced and how she or he grappled with them. You must show your character in action and highlight the drama of his life.

At the end, it is necessary to show how the hero's achievements helped those around him and to evaluate the contribution he made for the benefit of mankind. When the reader reaches the last page, he should be left with a feeling that nothing worthy is accomplished without supreme effort, hard work, perseverence and the will to live life to its full.

To make it entertaining : Introduce some side characters — relatives, friends or associates of the subject. There could be the mother, the old friend or the cook of the house. The use of warm, human interest details from the life of the subject could easily break up the monotony of dry facts. However, be careful to select only those characters and events which fit into the framework of the story and help you to develop the individual's personality and character.

Once you have introduced your side characters, you can bring in dialogues. The reader can then picture the subject in his true form — his relationship with his family and friends, his reactions to different situations and his capacity to share the joys and sorrows of others. Here too, one has to invent only realistic sounding dialogues which could have possibly taken place.

Writing about living persons : It is a comparatively more interesting experience to write about people who are alive. Your readers, too, will be naturally interested in a well known contemporary figure. The greatest advantage in writing a biography of a living person is that one can easily collect material, verify the facts and clear up doubts. Your best course of action is to first seek an interview with the individual. Tell him honestly why you are interested in him. In most cases, the person would be happy to see his or her life story published. If you find it difficult to elicit certain facts and details from the subject himself, try to get acquainted with people who are intimate with the subject and can fill in the blanks. Approach members of his family. They may be more keen to talk about him than the individual himself. Eye witness accounts always add more colour to a biography.

Another great advantage of writing about a living person is that after the final rewriting you can show the manuscript to him for correction of any factual errors that may have crept in. Try to obtain his approval of your manuscript — it will lend your work authenticity.

A word of caution is needed here. Writing about a living person involves exposing details of his private life, which sometimes the person concerned may resent. This can lead to problems for the writer. Be tactful, try not to hurt the feelings of the person you are portraying. Objectivity, tempered with concern and understanding will help you overcome any difficulties you may face.

Writing a Fantasy

Fantasy is the literature of magic. It may begin on a realistic note but quickly enters the realm of the imagination. Fantasy takes the reader to an entirely new world where strange experiences based on the imagination of the writer have been woven together.

Fantasy, in a real sense, is speculative fiction. Or, one might say, fantasy is an extension of the reality itself. Fantasy differs from a real life story in the originality of its conception and its imaginative quality. In realistic fiction the writer can make the reader see the room, the house, the lawn and the rest of the environment. The world of fantasy is recognisable but distant. To take your reader to the fantasy-world you have to build special roads, bylanes and footpaths. And this has to be done very smoothly, to give an appearance of reality.

Writing successful fantasy requires a thorough apprenticeship in writing realistic short stories for children. Until you have learnt through experience how to write the realistic story and to present the real world do not attempt the far more difficult genre of fantasy.

Fantasies are written for all age groups though they are more popular with young children than with teenagers. The first fantasy stories are for beginner listeners and readers. Children of this age group greatly enjoy the liberties that fantasy takes with reality. The magical gods and goddesses of Indian mythology and fantastic folktale about *yakshas, apsaras,* witches and demons hold youngsters spellbound. The flying carpet or flying horse is a delightful old device to take the child into the fantasy world. Stories of a land where the rivers are full of milk and the houses are made of sweets and sugar fascinate the young.

Though many folktales are creations of the imagination and have several characteristics of the fantasy these lack one very important element of modernity.

Science today is accomplishing the wonders which magic did in yesteryear. Today's fantasy, whether it is a fantastic story or a science fiction, has to have the quality of modernity. It should be sparkling fresh, original and clearly recognisable as such. It is not too far removed from the realistic notions of today and the possible notions of tomorrow.

A fantasy world has its own logic which is established by the author. For that the writer must set the rules, prepare an outline and then write. Some important aspects to be borne in mind are:

— it must be easy to understand
— it must be meaningful
— it should be logical all through
— it should remain within the world created by the writer
— it should not carry any loose ends

While writing a fantasy you need three tools which will help you to make the unreal real. Firstly, you have to create an unreal world, that is, an unusual place, environment or situation. Secondly, you must find characters appropriate to this fantasy world. The third challenge is to develop a strong visual sense of your fantasy world and the characters that inhabit it.

First fantasy stories: For young children let your hero or heroine be a simple character, a child, a personified toy or personified animal or any other fantasy creature. There must of course be a strong central idea, and a simple, well developed plot. Keep all the requirements of length and vocabulary discussed in earlier chapters in mind. The writing style should be rhythmic and pleasing to the ear when read aloud. Words play an important part in fantasies for the very young. Repetition of one situation, with variations each time, are greatly enjoyed and can be used to advantage in fantasy. Universal themes are often the most suitable for first fantasy stories. Lay down the logic of your story first, then weave your illogical world within the framework set out for it.

Fantasy for the eight plus age group: These kinds like fantasies as much as they enjoy down to earth stories. A fantasy for them can begin on a realistic note but gradually develop into a magical piece, often assuming some inner symbolic significance. For this age group, there are no serious limitations of vacabulary, length, idea or theme, so your ideas and imagination can have free rein. Dr. Do Little's adventures and the story of Mary Poppins are good examples of fantasy. For the older age group *Gulliver's Travels, Robinson Crusoe, The Arabian Nights, Don Quixote,* E.B. White's *Stuart Little, Charlotte's Web* and *Trumpet of the Swan,* J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit,* are fascinating fantasies which have become classics.

Technical accomplishment as a writer is important, but more than that a genuine involvement with children is needed to sustain successful stories. There are few fantasy writers for this age group and it is a field with a lot of opportunities.

Fantasy and science fiction for the older age group: Fantasy for the older age group in a well developed form is seen in modern science fiction. The magical world of fairies and dwarves is replaced by the lure of the fanciful push button age. While the fantasy of yesteryears dealt with the past, science fiction deals with possibilities in the present and the future. Science fiction is about the effect of science upon people and also upon our environment. Science fiction demands a highly imaginative mind and the ability to speculate.

Writing science fiction is a specialised job. It is important for the writer to have a good basic knowledge of science besides skills in writing fiction. Reading up on current scientific developments old and new discoveries, possible inventions and a vivid imagination can suggest an engrossing plot. Read all available material and consider the possibilities. You have to invent a new world and plan even the smallest detail of it.

Science fiction is concept oriented. A single concept can trigger off a story. The plot is built around this concept and the story characters merely illustrate it. Make sure your story does not move around without getting interesting. Often beginning writers introduce a number of fantastic characters and situations into the story but are unable to relate them to the story plot. Each character must have something special to do that is directly relevant to the story. While writing your first draft you might include situations and characters which do not directly relate to the plot, leaving loose ends. Such loose ends can be tied up when you revise your story.

Fantasy offers a unique opportunity and a challenge to a creative writer. It is worth a try.

Revising Your Manuscript

By completing the first draft of your manuscript you have already accomplished a major task. The material can now be read critically and polished into a finished product.

First consider the following suggestions :

- never send out your first draft to an editor
- never delude yourself that what you have set down on paper is sacred and unchangeable
- never revise a story immediately after completing it, give yourself time for introspection.

Revision is basically a critical reading of your story and improving upon it. Once you feel you are out of the 'Spell' of your story, you are ready to revise your manuscript. Generally it takes three to four weeks to reach this stage. This 'cooling off' period will enable you to take a detached look at your story and sharpen your critical faculties.

Five step plan for revision

You would have already numbered your pages by this time. If not, then do so before you get into the confusing business of rearranging them. Now read your manuscript quickly to have an overall view of what you have written. Be as objective as possible when you read. Wherever you find that a passage is not flowing smoothly, mark it with a pencil and continue reading. If some new idea occurs to you or you find that something needs to be added or removed or presented differently, note that down also, if necessary, on a separate sheet of paper.

What mars smooth reading?

- information in a work of fiction
- author's own views

— unnecessary details
— repetition
— difficult words
— incorrect usage of language
— cliches and worn out phrases
— long and overloaded sentences
— didactic style
— addressing the reader directly
— long lectures in dialogues
— change of viewpoints
— slow story movement
— factual inconsistencies
— unnatural behaviour of story characters.

Evaluate your reactions

Read your script carefully and ask yourself :

— does your main character hold your interest?
— would a young reader be interested in the story?
— is the story entertaining?
— does the story flow smoothly?
— have you been able to create the emotional impact which you wanted your reader to experience?
— is the story convincing and does it create the illusion of reality?
— is the story suitable for the intended age group?
— is it possible to identify with the main character?
— do other story characters come alive and look and behave naturally?
— is there enough suspense?
— is there enough action, drama and humour to keep a young reader's interest alive?
— is the action held back for too long?
— is there enough dialogue?
— does the story grow with the action and dialogue?

If questions like these raise doubts in your mind, jot the problems down on a sheet of paper.

Examine the structural plot of your story :

Beginning : The opening of your story must catch the child's interest. If not, rework it. Your reader should be charmed by your beginning and should be compelled to read on until he finishes the book.

The beginning must set the mood. Your main character and his problem must become the reader's problem. This will greatly enhance his enjoyment.

Middle : The middle of your story should step into a real problem that the main character is facing. The main character must work to resolve the problem and cross the hurdles in his way to reach his goal. There should also be some conflict and complications.

End : Stories for juniors must have a happy ending. Teenagers can bear the impact of an unhappy ending provided it suits the story.

Weeding and Replanting

When you read your text you will find many repetitions. Take out whatever you feel is extraneous. If you find paragraphs and situations that are poorly connected or inadequately developed, replant and develop wherever necessary, weaving the text together closely.

Weed out hesitant words and make definite statements. As the author you know if 'he did' or 'didn't.' The use of non-committal words is, however, acceptable in a dialogue and you can often use them with great effect.

Weed out adjectives, if any, before the nouns.

For example :

'Little Sunil'	— Remove 'little'
'Poor Krishna'	— Remove 'poor'

Replant familiar words in place of unfamiliar words. For replanting appropriate words, a thesaurus or a word finder is very helpful. Critically examine the construction of your sentences. Join disjointed sentences and rewrite awkward portions. Keep the age group of the reader in mind.

Polishing :

Your writing must sparkle. Polish up your manuscript by carefully examining your style and use of language. Sit down with your dictionary, thesaurus and word finder and the appropriate words.

Edit your writing and check your grammar and punctuation. Be sure that you have used one person, one tone and one tense throughout. Continuous use of the passive voice is not liked in modern writing. Write straight and use active language. If the story is set in the past, keep the past tense. Changing of tense causes confusion and is not appreciated at all.

Your style is your own. Do not try to imitate anyone else's. By writing constantly and confidently you will develop this individual style. After some experience you will find yourself writing smoothly and with ease.

Like all good craftsmen you must realise that there is a point beyond which tinkering will do more harm than good. By all means revise, edit and polish. When you feel that you have done your best, stop.

Your next step is to retype or rewrite the text in legible handwriting before submitting it to an editor.

Mailing Your Manuscript to the Editor

Now that your manuscript is ready you must be eager to see it in print. Here is how to go about it.

It is best to get your manuscript typed, for the simple reason that the editor will find it easier to read. Besides, a typed script always makes a good impression. If you do not have typing facilities, then just write in clear longhand. If you decide to submit your manuscript to a publisher in a foreign country, then typing is absolutely essential.

Use white paper for typing and always make two carbon copies. Type on one side of the page and in double space leaving a one and a half inch margin on all four sides. This makes editing easier. Always mail the first copy to the editor, never a carbon copy. Editors usually take good care of your manuscript, but sometimes a manuscript can be damaged or lost, so keep the carbon copies carefully.

Short Story

The first page of a short story should bear your name and adress on the top left side of the page. The title of the story should be typed one third of the page down and should be well centred. Below the title, type the word 'By' and under it your name. Now begin the text rightaway, taking care that you do not type right upto the margin of the page. The first page of the story should be like this.

Your name   Total words
Address

TITLE IN CAPITAL LETTERS
By
Your Name

Begin your story three or four spaces below your name. Use double space, leaving a margin of one and a half inches on all four sides. Also take care that the typing does not run right up to the end of the page.

Leave five spaces from the margin when you begin a new paragraph. The typed page should present a neat appearance. After finishing the first page, the second page should begin with your last name on the left hand top corner. The page number should be typed on the right hand top corner. The text of the story may begin five spaces below.

A book length manuscript

The manuscript of a book should have a separate title page with your name and address on the left hand top and the approximate number of words on the right hand top corner (as shown in the specimen for the short story). The title of the book should be in capital letters and typed in the centre of the page. The text should begin on the next page and each chapter should also begin on a fresh page. Your last name and page number should be typed at the top of each page. This will help in identifying the manuscript.

In a book length manuscript it is a common practice to have a table of contents and to add a preface or introduction or author's note. Such material should be typed on a separate page and numbered in small Roman numerals. Your first page of text matter should come after these pages and should also carry your name and address. This is necessary to locate the manuscript in case the title page is lost. On the last page of your manuscript, again write your name and address at the bottom left of the page.

When you finish typing your manuscript, separate the first pages from the carbon copies and put them together. Do not staple a book length manuscript. Paper clips are better to keep it together. Short manuscripts however may be stapled, because even if the manuscrit gets damaged it can be retyped.

Proof reading

You must carefully proof read your manuscript. Use measuring ruler which you can slide down line by line, checking each line carefully. Do not proof read more than an hour at a time to avoid mistakes. Rest your eyes before you start again.

Corrections should be made in ink. A page with four to five conspicuous mistakes should be retyped or rewritten. Whatever corrections you make in your first copy, you must also correct in your carbon copy.

How to mail it

Never bind your manuscript. Do not staple it. Use paper clips or tie the pages together loosely with thick thread or put them in a proper file.

If your manuscript is not more than eight pages long, fold it thrice and mail it like any business letter with an accompanying letter to the editor. Always enclose a self addressed envelope to ensure prompt return if it is not accepted. If your manuscript is more than eight pages long send it flat.

Letter to the editor

The letter that accompanies your manuscript should be formal and short. Discuss the manuscript briefly and if you are a published author mention your publications and also your publishers. Avoid self praise. Your manuscript will stand on its merit alone.

Choosing the right publisher or magazine is essential before mailing your manuscript. Carefully study the type of material being published by different publishers. If you are not sure, write a letter enquiring whether the editor would be interested in the kind of manuscript you have. In western countries market lists are readily available and provide convenient reference material for this purpose. In India and neighbouring countries such lists are not available, so you should compile a list of your own, comprising addresses of the publishing houses and the kind of material they usually publish. If you have the opportunity, make an appointment to meet the editor. Personal contact counts a lot in our country.

Understanding Your Editor

It is a common experience for writers to have manuscripts rejected by editors. Sometimes this happens because manuscripts are mailed without understanding the particular editorial policy of the publisher but quite often, the manuscript is either weak in some respect or still requires further work or has certain negative aspects which an editor disapproves.

Editors are busy people, who often receive a large number of unsolicited manuscripts. The common practice in editorial offices is to scan manuscripts and to return unacceptable manuscripts without ascribing reasons. The writer is left to guess the reasons for rejection. In the case of non-fiction the editor may not require a manuscript on the particular subject or the material may not have been well presented.

With regard to fiction the editor would want a manuscript which would be accepted by the readers as well as parents who often decide what their wards should read. Here are some common reasons which could be cause for a rejection.

Readers like to see moral behaviour in the stories, no matter what their own standard of behaviour be.

— Ours is a conservative and somewhat inhibited society and no responsible editor would like to touch a story for children which might offend the sensibility of parents and tradition. For example, sex and any perverse behaviour is almost taboo. Intercaste marriages are generally unacceptable in our society. In fact, you should avoid references to caste creed and other controversial issues. Leave such issues to social workers and other enthusiasts.

— Whenever there are strong differences of opinion on an issue and the general public is divided, it would be discreet to avoid such controversies completely. Also editors do not like individual opinions in juvenile fiction and do not expect a writer to be a propagandist. You are a fiction writer and your purpose is to entertain your readers. You would certainly like to have a wide readership and so would be well advised to keep off such issues.

— The villain should not belong to professions which are well regarded by society — teaching, medicine, law and the like. If you have reason to do it, try to do it inoffensively. Show that you are using the character as an individual, not as a representative of his profession.

— The hero should have predominantly good qualities, though like any other normal human being he would have some weak characteristics too. Select a hero belonging to your own country. It is easier for you to characterise him and also enables the reader to easily identify with him. Even if you take a foreign setting, your hero or heroine should still belong to a country you know well, so that you can do justice to the portrayal.

— An anti-hero winning the battle at the end of the story is totally unacceptable. Whatever explanations you may add or whichever way you may present it, the victory of an anti-hero would always be frowned upon. It is expected that the villian will eventually be punished and defeated. To provide a satisfying end to your story you have to follow the tradition that good prevails over evil.

— Too much suffering and the details of suffering does not make interesting reading material. The reader looks for entertainment. He will put up with some suffering but it should not be excessive. Deaths leave the reader feeling morbid. Include only a minimum of suffering and leave the rest to the imagination of your readers.

— In this age of science, supernatural beings and superstitions are not easily accepted. Children believe in what they see and are unlikely to appreciate ideas which may be fascinating, but are far removed from reality.

— Slighting a mother, father, or a teacher, who are regarded as respectable by children, is unlikely to be welcome. Children do not appreciate anyone mocking at their elders in real life and the same rule will apply in writing for them. Mocking at a disabled person is also not well regarded.

— Criticism of authority is regarded with disfavour. Do not belittle law, or any authority which enforces law, like the police or the judiciary.

— Cruelty and torture, whether physical or mental, should be avoided completely. It would not leave a good impression on the mind of the reader.

— An accidental happening or a coincidence could possibly be used in introducing a story problem, but it should not appear elsewhere or as the solution of the story problem. Such incidents cannot provide a satisfying end. For a writer such a solution may often be an easy way out for resolving the story problem but it is most unconvincing to the reader.

— Avoid open sermons and the do and don't style. Beginning writers often tend to address their young audience, give long lectures expressing their own opinion, or stuff the story with too much information. This is disliked by readers and therefore by editors also. Even if the editor approves of the central idea in the fiction, a didactic style would put him off.

— For sucessfully placing your manuscript with an editor, think from the viewpoint of an editor. He selects a manuscript on the basis of its possibility of having wide appeal and saleability.

Aids to Writing

Keep in touch with what is being written currently for children and with the new writing techniques being used. The work of fellow writers, with whose writing yours will be compared and judged, should be read with care. Reading published literature will also give you a clear idea of editorial requirements. Since children's literature in India is still in its infancy, you can benefit a lot by reading good children's books from other countries.

In this book, you have been acquainted with the special requirements of children's fiction and the essentials of the craft of writing. Regard these ideas as only the beginning of a process — and learning is a life long process. You will find the following reference books very valuable.

Reference books

— A standard dictionary
— A thesaurus in dictionary form
— Readers' Digest Family Word Finder, New Thesaurus of Synonyms and Antonyms in Dictionary Form (a Reader's Digest publication.)
— An atlas
— A book of proverbs

Many writers, editors and librarians have contributed to the literature about books for children. I have greatly benefited from these books which have given me a deep insight into the art and craft of writing for children. Given below is a list of other books, you can read with benefit.

1. —Blishen, Edward. ((Ed.) *Writers on Writing for Children—The Thorny Paradise* Hammondsworth: Penguin Books (England)
2. —*Best Books for Children.* New York: Bowkee, (U.S.A.)
3. —Colby, Jean Poindexter. *Writing. Illustrating and Editing Children's Books.* New York : Hastings House (U.S.A.)
4. —Elwood, Maren. *Characters make your Story.* Beston. The Writer. (U.S.A.)
5. —Eyre, Frank. *British Children's Books in the Twentieth Century.* London; Longman (England)
6. —Flesh, Rudolf. *A B C of style.* New York : Harper and Row (U.S.A.)
7. —Flesh, Rudolf. *The Art of Readable Writing.* New York : Harper and Row. (U.S.A.)
8. —Fitikides, T.J. *Common Mistakes in English.* London : Longman (England)
9. —Fugate, Francis L. Viewpoint: *Key to Fiction Writing.* Boston : The Writer (U.S.A.)
10. —Haviland, Virginia. *Children and Literature — Views and Reviews.* Scott, Forseman (U.S.A.)
11. —Hildick, Wallace. *Children and Fiction.* London. Evans Bros. (England)
12. —Hollowell, Lillian. (Ed.) *A Book of Children's Literature.* Holt, Rinehard and Winston (U.S.A.)
13. —Hunter, Mollie, *Talent is Not Enough — Writing for Children.* New York, Harper and Row (U.S.A.)
14. —Karl, Jean. *From Childhood to Childhood : Children's Books and Their Creators.* New York : Simon and Schuster. (U.S.A.)
16. Sloane, William. *The Craft of Writing.* W. W. Norton & Company. New York (U.S.A.)
17. —Southhall, Evan. *A Journey of Discovery — On Writing for Children.* London : Kestrel Books (England)
18. —Strunk, William & White, E.B. *The Elements of Style.* New York : Macmillan (U.S.A.)
19. —Tucker, Nicholas. (Ed.) *Suitable for Chil-*

dren —. Sussex University Press (England)

20. —Whitney, Phillis A. *Writing Juvenile Fiction.* Boston : The Writer. (U.S.A.)

21. —Williams, Gladys. *Children and Their Books.* London : Gerald Duckworth (England)

22. —Wyndham, Lee. *Writing for Children and Teenagers.* Cincinnati ; Writer's Digest. (U.S.A.)

23. —Yolen, Jane. *Writing Books for Children.* Boston : The Writer. (U.S.A.)